

The Golden Whistle

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Many years ago, a young warrior was returning home from a five-year conquest in foreign lands. Exhausted and bone-weary, every step the poor man took seemed a mile long, and every hunger pang he felt was like a knife inside his stomach. The solitary thing that drove him onward was the irrepressible hope of reuniting with his family when he reached his destination; it was this hope to which he blindly clung that had carried him through the long years of battle.

When he had been traveling for three consecutive days without rest, the warrior came upon a three-way fork in the road. Before each trail, a wooden sign engraved with dark, foreboding letters read: "Enter a path; let your own will discern—but once you have chosen, you may not return." With nervous apprehension, the warrior looked down the first path, then the second, and finally the third, but none seemed familiar to him. Throwing up his hands in dismay, the warrior sank down upon a rock to ponder over his options. "I shall have to select one and hope that it will lead me in the right direction," he thought morosely. But he was loath to rise and follow his own advice, as the chance that he would choose the correct path seemed slim.

Suddenly a fluttering sound was heard from above him, and, in a moment, a vibrant little bird had alighted on the rock beside him. The warrior was struck by its unusual beauty as he noted, with admiration, the pure blue pigment of its wings and the emerald green color of its eyes. But he was even more startled when the bird began to speak.

"Are you in trouble, friend?" it chirped with a voice delightfully sweet and soft. "I have been watching you from that tree, and your expression is one filled with sadness. Perhaps I can be of service?"

The warrior smiled at the thought of such a little bird offering him aid, but proceeded to acquaint the animal with his tale all the same. "After all," he thought to himself, "what have I to lose?" After telling the bird of his five-year conquest and his laborious journey home, the young warrior ended rather miserably, "I have just now reached this fork in the road and do not know which way to go. If I take the wrong path I may never reach my village, and the warning clearly states that I can never return."

The little bird clasped its wings together eagerly. "Do not worry, friend," it chirped encouragingly. "I happen to know of your village. I have flown over it many times, and can tell you without a doubt which path will lead you there."

The warrior looked at his small friend in joyous surprise. "Then tell me, little bird, which path should I take?"

The bird hopped to the ground and pointed to the third path with its brilliant wing. "If you take that path, you will find your way home."

The warrior rose with renewed vigor and strode purposefully toward the third pathway. "But, wait!" cried the silvery voice of the bird, causing the warrior to hesitate and turn back. A little golden whistle dropped at his feet.

"If you need me again," the bird chirped hurriedly, "simply blow once into that whistle, and I will invariably come to you."

The young warrior bent and picked up the whistle and secured it to a cord which hung about his neck. "Thank you, my little friend," he replied with humility. "I may need your help again."

"You need only to whistle," the little bird repeated and, in the blink of an eye, it flew away.

By the next day the path had evolved into a winding forest trail. The young warrior had long ago run out of any food, and was delighted to discover a bush that was abundant with large, succulent berries. After eating his fill, he continued on his way, feeling better than he had for days. As he strode happily along, the young warrior scooped up a group of stones in his hand and began idly tossing them into the bushes that he passed by. He had hardly thrown the fourth stone, however, when a sharp hissing sound emitted from within one of the bushes. A large, brightly-colored snake emerged, hissing viciously, and before the warrior had sufficient time to react, it struck at his leg with a savage bite. Uttering a cry of pain and alarm, the young man backed swiftly away from the dreaded creature. When the snake had receded back into its haven, the warrior examined his leg to assess the damage. The wound was bleeding profusely and, even as he gazed down at it, the warrior's vision began to grow blurry. Clutching at his injured leg, the young man sank to the ground in a sudden bout of dizziness. "What am I to do?" he thought wildly. "Have I come this far only to die?" Then he remembered the golden whistle hanging about his neck and, with a surge of hope, he took it and blew with all the strength that remained. A delightful, silvery sound rang throughout the entire forest, bouncing off of the rocks and trees and momentarily easing the aching of his whirling head.

In an instant the little bird was beside him. "What can I do for you, friend?" it chirped.

“A snake,” the young warrior panted, pointing toward the bushes. “It has bitten me, and I fear I am going to die and thus never see my family again! Is there anything that can be done?”

The bird stared at the wound thoughtfully, then started up briskly. “Wait here,” it ordered, and flew away beyond the warrior’s sight.

“It has already abandoned me,” the warrior thought desolately. “There is nothing that can be done.” But a moment later the bird returned, carrying in its beak something green and leafy, and deposited it onto the ground beside him.

“Press this onto the bite,” the bird commanded, “And do not let go until the blood has ceased to flow.”

“And if I do this I will live?” the young man questioned eagerly.

The bird nodded its small head, a slight twinkle in its eyes. “Yes, friend; there is nothing to fear. In a little while you shall be well enough to continue on your journey.” The young warrior thanked his friend profusely. “I will never forget this,” he promised sincerely.

“It was nothing,” the bird replied modestly. “And remember—if you ever have need of me again, simply whistle.” With that, it flew away and vanished among the trees.

The warrior did all that the bird had commanded him to do and, within a half hour, he felt his strength return to him. He slowly rose and, checking the wound to be sure that the bleeding had altogether ceased, he proceeded down the forest trail, amazed at his incredible luck and grateful to his little friend.

After he had been journeying on for two more days without further incident, the young man began to feel lighthearted and hopeful once again. His wound had begun to mend, and there was plenty of food to eat along the way. Soon a merry song burst from his lips and, when he had grown tired of singing, he fell to whistling cheerfully. Alas, his lively tune was ended abruptly as, stopping short, he found himself on the bank of a surging river. Its ominous waters, deep and enchanted, rushed onward without pausing for breath so that no traveler could pass through. Without a moment’s hesitation, however, the young man once again picked up the tiny golden whistle and blew. Immediately, the little bird appeared on a branch above him.

“What can I do for you, friend?” its well-known voice chirped once more.

After thanking the creature again for its help two days before, the young warrior humbly explained his dilemma. As it listened, the bird smiled (if, indeed, birds can smile).

“That is not so difficult a thing to fix,” it replied lightly. “I have only to open my beak and sing and the waters will become smooth and calm.”

So saying, the little bird let out from its throat a song so delightful and enchanting that even the animals of the forest paused to listen and, for a moment, the trees ceased to sway in their hypnotic motion as they bent their ears toward the bird’s sweet song. Instantly the waters had become tranquil and placid, and the young man waded safely across to the other side without any trouble at all. When he had stepped upon the opposite bank, he looked back to give the bird his thanks, but caught his breath in wonder. On the other side stood a lovely young woman, wearing a beautiful blue dress that shimmered as brightly as the water. Her hair was golden and fine, and as she waded towards him it seemed to radiate the warm beams of the sun. “I must be in a trance,” the warrior thought to himself, rubbing his sleepless eyes with his hands. But when he opened them again the woman was still there, as beautiful as ever.

As she gracefully stepped onto his side of the shore, the lady smiled up at him. “Do you not recognize me, friend?” she asked, her voice light and melodious.

He gazed into her eyes, which were as green as an emerald and, in a flash, he realized her secret. “Yes; you are the little bird who has helped me along my arduous journey,” he replied in wonder. “But how can that be?”

The maiden sighed and, to the warrior’s surprise, shining tears arose in her eyes. “There were once three friends of mine whom, by my own negligence and carelessness, I wronged deeply. Because of this, I was cursed to live in the forest as a woodland bird, only to be transformed back into my true self when I had done three good deeds to make up for my three wrongs.” She looked up at him gratefully and added, “I have waited endlessly for a chance to prove myself once again, and it was because of you that the spell was finally broken.”

The warrior believed the maiden’s tale and entreated her to accompany him to his own town and there become his bride. She readily accepted and, when the two reached the warrior’s village, they were married and lived happily together in peace. The little golden whistle was preserved and cherished for many long years but, mysteriously, became lost upon the death of the warrior’s beautiful wife. To this day it has never been found, though its light, silvery sound can sometimes be heard in the deepest parts of the forest. Or perhaps it is only the wind in the trees.